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Comments to CT Legislative Committee- Supporting Rep Hennessey HR 5274

Good Day to you, CT Legislators, elected representatives of the people, in whose hands the citizens of CT repose a trust that you are caring and practical people, with a broad commitment and fiduciary duty to serve the people of the State, and to operate within a framework including governance checks and balances to maintain an open, accountable and transparent process. I ask your support for H.R. 5274. My name is John Marshall Lee and I am a lifetime CT resident. I was raised in the New Haven area receiving all of my education in Hamden, West Haven and New Haven. Moved to Fairfield for 25 years as a business owner/taxpayer and resident and for the past 25 years I have been a homeowner, voter and taxpayer in Bridgeport as well.

I am a Registered Democrat. This is ignored locally in our one party town, because I ask many questions and expect answers. I am often accused of being a Republican. Such is what happens when the process of governance is broken, when checks and balance are an abstraction and where conflict of interest and ethics in the public sphere are ignored.

I am here to inform you that the legislature in Bridgeport that we call a City Council, as well as the overall City governance process does not operate in the fashion that you do. To believe otherwise is to have listened to a "snow job" from our City lobbyist or other persons who have allowed the system to devolve and become corrupt.

Your attention is needed to redress an unintended but deadly imbalance that exists in Bridgeport today. Our legislators may be elected every two years but their functions are pro forma. They do not operate as representing the folks who voted for them or they would be more careful with taxpayer funds-State taxpayers as well as local taxpayers. For the FY 2012, the Single State audits accompanying the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report - 2012 shows that CT provided over \$270 Million of assistance in addition to over \$50 Million from the Federal government. That total is appreciated by local taxpayers who feel drained by the mill rate over 41 and with five year revaluation due October 1, 2013 due to rise as property values have significantly lessened and new development does not swell our net taxable Grand List. (You have dealt with special assistance to our Public Schools most recently, for our severely underfunded public safety Pension Plan A and with numerous complaints to S.E.E.C. Broken governance.)

With at least six of twenty City Council members working in City departments and other close relatives providing realistic conflicts for several others, the City Council delivers vote after vote affirming rather than reviewing and providing a responsible pushback to City Hall. They have ceased to understand that conflicts of interest and appearance of same are to be avoided. They continue to vote, without recusing themselves, on all issues at the City level, including the \$515 Million budget passed in one motion and vote last May. Directly preceding that was a vote on Federal HUD-CDBG funds. Seven motions and votes were taken because the City Council had to read and sign Federal "conflict of interest" statements and many had to abstain from a vote because of identified conflicts. Not so on all other matters unfortunately.

We have no Finance Board per our Charter to assist in a studied review of proposed budgets, to monitor them in operation and to look at the overall capital structure of the City including Pension, Other Post Employment Benefits and liabilities like the Internal Service Fund that doubles on average over a ten year period with no plan to control or amortize.

To briefly explain I have brought some signs to highlight our problems that you can begin to remedy:

- There are no watchdogs to act fiscally responsible. Whatever City Hall wants, it gets. It removed the Internal Auditor some years ago though it claims such a position in this year's CAFR with no comment on how "internal controls" operate. At the State Level you have Democrat and Republican auditors. What a concept!
- A monthly financial report is due, per the City Charter by the 4th Friday of the following month, 12 months per year. Only last year was a final month June report produced for the first time in 20 years and it was never discussed per B&A minutes. Variances show up in all reports but no longer do the reports provide a narrative to assist busy City Council persons.
- And voter's options to be heard or listened to are circumscribed. As a non-resident I can attend a Finance Board meeting in Fairfield and raise my hand, be recognized and receive a response before the Board goes to the next agenda item. In Bridgeport I can attend and listen to the seven members of the Budget and Appropriations Committee discuss matters brought before them with insufficient detail (and not shared with the public as Exhibits are not part of the electronic record of meeting minutes) and pushed for a vote because of time pressure. Council members attempt to assist the administration but have lost sight of the broad public interest.

There is more but time, space and your attention are limited. Help our City recover from a long term slide into an undemocratic governance structure. The City Council is our only potential watchdog body but it has blinded itself to voters except at election time, plays deaf to regular comments from public speakers at Council meeting speaker sessions which many members do not attend, and refuse to raise their voices in question or comment in public to City Hall matters and therefore become dumb, as well.

No watchdogs overseeing local taxpayer funds over \$275 Million. No expert, balanced, independent fiscal review body to monitor State and Federal funds over \$320 Million. Comments in the auditor's Management Letter regarding internal controls. A financial blizzard is predictably on its way. You can do something about it to help the patient back to health through the governmental process of voting for non-conflicted candidates for office.

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